

BUSINESS

Want to keep good workers? Praise them, a new study finds

SEPTEMBER 18, 2024 · 5:00 AM ET
HEARD ON MORNING EDITION

Andrea Hsu

2-Minute Listen

+ PLAYLIST

⬇ ⬅ ➡ ⬆



A new report from Gallup and Workhuman finds employees who get meaningful recognition for their work are 45% less likely to leave their jobs.
Rudithan Nagley/Getty Images

America's relationship with work has been tenuous lately. Remember the wave of [quiet quitting](#) in 2022?

In surveys over the past couple of years, Gallup researchers have found [only about a third of U.S. workers feel engaged](#) with their jobs. It's a concern for companies and the economy.

Fortunately, researchers have identified a fairly simple solution: Recognize your employees' achievements.

Meaningful feedback changes how people feel about their work, says Meishann Martin, senior director of people analytics and research at the HR software firm Workhuman, who along with Gallup tracked the career paths of more than 3,400 workers over two years.

Across a number of industries, employees who received high-quality recognition on the job were 45% less likely to have left that job between 2022 and 2024, they found.

"It is about catching good behavior as it happens," says Martin. "Imagine if you're doing things at work that nobody sees and you feel like nobody cares about. You can imagine how that would be demoralizing."

Also key is recognizing people not just for the work they do, but for who they are, she says.

"You're sending a signal that 'I see you. I see your special sauce. Your special sauce belongs here.'"

An antidote to loneliness and stress

When it comes to recognition, a couple of factors appear to be driving the higher rates of retention. For one, people feel less lonely when their contributions are praised.

"It creates community. It helps people feel connected to each other," which in turn keeps them from seeking work elsewhere, Martin says.

The research also points to recognition as an antidote to stress.

Gallup asked survey respondents if they felt stressed the previous day. Those who said they felt recognized on the job reported lower levels of stress and burnout than those who said they were not recognized.

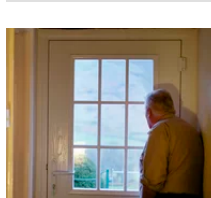
"While [recognition] doesn't change the objective reality, it does change the subjective perception of what is happening," says Martin.

Recognition can drive professional development

Another finding emerging from the longitudinal surveys is that high-quality feedback can fuel professional development.



BUSINESS
America, we have a problem. People aren't feeling engaged with their work



HEALTH
America has a loneliness epidemic. Here are 6 steps to address it

That was Andy Hernandez's experience. He was working in car financing in Greenville, S.C., trying to figure out how to get ahead, when he decided to learn Excel on his own time so he could use it at work.

He began pitching ideas using his newly acquired skills. Managers liked what he was doing and told him as much.

"It motivated me to to know that, hey, all this extra stuff that I'm doing, it's not only getting recognized, but it's helping me show that I'm ready for the next step," he says.

He rose through the ranks, eventually becoming a team leader. He says he looked for opportunities to show appreciation for his team, even once bringing them his mom's tacos and a big tres leches cake.

Younger people expect more appreciation

There are generational differences when it comes to the desire for feedback, Gallup and Workhuman found.

Younger workers, who feel less attached to their workplaces than their parents, have a higher expectation of appreciation.

"I think this younger generation, to their credit, are coming in and going, 'Well, I want to be able to spend time with my family. Work doesn't have to be my life,'" says Martin.

Fortunately for them, company leaders are also increasingly recognizing the importance of praise in the workplace.

In 2024, Gallup and Workhuman found 42% of senior leaders reporting their organizations value employee recognition, up from 28% in 2022.

workforce gallup work-life balance



Match Alert! Double Your Impact

Thanks to a generous donor, **every dollar you contribute will be matched**, doubling the impact of your support. Join us in keeping quality journalism and trusted stories alive.

Can you help?



LIFE KIT

Dear Life Kit: I resent that my WFH partner has more free time than I do

More Stories From NPR

- ASIA
A bookstore too controversial for China finds home in D.C.
- BUSINESS
Tupperware, no longer a kitchen staple, files for bankruptcy
- MIDDLE EAST CRISIS — EXPLAINED
Tracking the exploding pagers used in apparent Israeli attack on Hezbollah
- THE INDICATOR FROM PLANET MONEY
Behind the Tiny Desk and other listener questions
- CONSIDER THIS FROM NPR
A year after the strike is the UAW still winning?
- ECONOMY
The Federal Reserve is on the verge of cutting interest rates. Here's what to know

Popular on NPR.org

- HEALTH
NPR Exclusive: U.S. overdose deaths plummet, saving thousands of lives
- POLITICS
The U.S. has had a long history of political violence, but experts see a new trend
- POLITICS
Senate Republicans block IVF bill, as Democrats elevate issue ahead of November election
- NEWSLETTER
So many music festivals have been canceled this year. What's going on?
- PLANET MONEY
99 Percent Invisible: The White Castle System of Eating Houses
- PLANET MONEY
Rate Expectations: What it means that the Fed is about to lower interest rates.

NPR Editors' Picks

- BOOK REVIEWS
'Brothers and Ghosts' is a multi-generational saga of the Vietnamese diaspora
- MUSIC NEWS
Shaboozey's hit 'A Bar Song (Tipsy)' is No. 1 again, and joins an elite club
- POP CULTURE HAPPY HOUR
'The Substance' is imaginary, but feminine self-hatred is real in this body horror
- I'M REALLY INTO
I played 'Survivor' in someone's backyard. Now I'm hooked on live reality games
- SPORTS
Lael Wilcox rode around the world and then went for another bike ride
- 2024 ELECTION
Georgia election officials worry a GOP-led board will OK last-minute voting changes

READ & LISTEN	CONNECT	ABOUT NPR	GET INVOLVED
Home	Newsletters	Overview	Support Public Radio
News	Facebook	Diversity	Sponsor NPR
Culture	Instagram	NPR Network	NPR Careers
Music	Press	Accessibility	NPR Shop
Podcasts & Shows	Public Editor	Ethics	NPR Events
	Corrections	Finances	NPR Extra
	Contact & Help		